



GREETINGS!

Welcome to this issue of Mark Twain National Forest Planning Journal. In this issue we provide news about two recent national events that will affect Mark Twain National Forest. Also included is a summary of proposed amendments to the Forest Plan that are or will be undergoing environmental analysis. This issue also contains information about our recently completed Monitoring Report for 1999. Our intent is to provide you with information and alert you to opportunities to become involved in Forest planning processes.

NEW PLANNING REGULATIONS RELEASED

On November 9, 2000, Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman announced a new rule that will guide management of America's national forests and grasslands. The rule, proposed in October 1999 and now finalized, will better protect the environment, improve public participation in forest activities, and integrate science more effectively into Forest Service decisions.

"We are increasing public participation in our planning process while ensuring that sound science and the goal of sustainability are the basis for all forest management activities," said Glickman. "We will manage the national forests in a way that protects the environment, while continuing to ensure a sustainable flow of goods and services such as timber, recreation, and clean water from the national forests."

The new rule is fully consistent with other ongoing Forest Service rule-making efforts and policies, including the proposed roadless area conservation policy. Under the final planning rule the Forest Service will evaluate whether roadless areas need additional protection when individual forests and grasslands revise their land management plans.

The rule specifies the process we will use to revise the Forest Plan for Mark Twain National Forest. It also applies to all future land management plan amendments, except those drafted in the next six months. In three years, the rule will also apply to all Forest Service projects.

The Forest Plan affects only national forest lands of Mark Twain National Forest and does not apply to private lands.

More information about the new planning rule can be obtained at <http://www.fs.fed.us/forum/nepa/rule/>

ROADLESS AREA CONSERVATION

On November 13, 2000, USDA's Forest Service released its preferred plan for protecting nearly 60 million acres of roadless areas in national forests, including 25,000 acres of inventoried roadless areas on Mark Twain National Forest. Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman will decide on a final plan in December.

The Forest Service's preferred plan, one of several alternatives contained in a final environmental impact statement, would --

- prohibit most road construction and reconstruction in inventoried roadless areas, including inventoried roadless areas on the Tongass National Forest;
- prohibit timber harvesting except for defined stewardship purposes in these same areas; and
- allow road construction when necessary for public safety and resource protection.

Stewardship purpose timber harvests would occur only to maintain or improve roadless characteristics. Such harvests would need to improve habitat for threatened, endangered, proposed, or sensitive species; reduce the risk of uncharacteristically severe fire; or restore ecological structure, function, and processes.

In developing the roadless plan, the Forest Service sought extensive public input, holding over 600 public meetings across the nation. Hundreds of thousands of people participated in this public process, generating over 1.6 million comments that were considered in the analysis and recommendation.

Mark Twain National Forest hosted five public meetings to provide information and solicit comments on the roadless area conservation proposal. A total of 157 persons attended these meetings. Many of them provided written comments on the proposal, and about twenty-five gave verbal comments.

The four-volume environmental impact study is available on the web at <http://roadless.fs.fed.us>. Printed copies are available for review at all Forest Service offices and public and municipal libraries nationwide. Copies can also be obtained by calling 1-800-384-7623. For more information about Mark Twain National Forest roadless areas, contact Laura Watts, 401 Fairgrounds Road, Rolla, MO 65401, or by phone at (573) 341-7471.

ANNUAL REPORT & MONITORING REPORT

Every year Mark Twain National Forest prepares an Annual Report to provide an overview of the past year's accomplishments, and compare them to previous years' accomplishments. A copy of the Annual Report for 1999 (the most recent one available) is enclosed.

Mark Twain National Forest also prepares a monitoring report, documenting our monitoring activities and findings for the previous year. Monitoring and evaluation is a continuous process done to determine if our resource management activities are meeting the goals, objectives, and management direction described in the Forest Plan.

The 1999 monitoring report is available by accessing the Mark Twain website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/marktwain/> and clicking on the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) link. If you do not have Internet access and would like a copy of the report, please contact us at 401 Fairgrounds Road, Rolla, MO 65401, or by phone at (573) 364-4621.

SCHEDULE OF PROPOSED PROJECTS

We have completed work on one plan amendment and are currently working on two amendments to the Mark Twain's Forest Plan. This issue of the Planning Journal gives a brief description of these amendments, plus the anticipated schedule for conducting and completing the environmental analyses.

These amendments will apply to all national forest system lands (Mark Twain National Forest) in Missouri. They will not apply to private lands, or lands managed by any other state or federal agency, and will not have any effect on private property rights.

Threatened and Endangered Species Management Amendment.

This amendment updated the Forest Plan standards and guidelines for habitat management for three threatened and endangered species (gray bat, bald eagle, Indiana bat). The amendment has been completed, and the decision notice was signed on March 20, 2000.

Recreation, Heritage Resources, & Fisheries Amendment.

This proposed amendment would change the recreation, heritage resources (historical and prehistoric sites on national forest lands), and fisheries management portions of the Forest Plan.

The public scoping period for this amendment began on May 28, 1999 and closed on July 15, 1999. During scoping the Forest asks for concerns and comments from the public on the proposal. Those comments and concerns were used to determine what issues needed to be considered in the environmental assessment, as well as what alternatives to the proposed action would be analyzed. A draft of the environmental assessment for this amendment is expected to be available in December 2000 or January 2001. A final decision is expected in spring of 2001. For more information, contact Nancy Feakes at Mark Twain National Forest, 401 Fairgrounds Road, Rolla, MO 65401, or by phone at (573) 341-7472.

Areas of Influence for Indiana Bat Caves Amendment

This proposed amendment would change the management direction for some National Forest lands around Indiana bat hibernacula (caves) and areas where reproductively active females have been found. A reproductively active female bat is one that is pregnant or lactating (nursing young).

The purpose and need for the proposed plan amendment is to protect Indiana bats and their habitat in and around hibernacula and known sites of reproductively active females. This may help reduce the decline of Indiana bat populations range-wide, and may contribute toward eventual recovery of the species.

The forest plan amendment is also needed to comply with and implement the Reasonable and Prudent Measures and Terms and Conditions of the US Fish & Wildlife Service Biological Opinion (BO) dated June 23, 1999. One of the mandatory actions specified in the BO and included in the March 20, 2000 Threatened and Endangered Species Management amendment (see above) was a requirement to determine areas of influence around Indiana bat hibernacula and pregnant or lactating female capture sites. The Forest is also required to develop management strategies for these areas that will contribute to the maintenance and recovery of the species. The designated areas of influence and management strategies will apply only to National Forest lands. This does not affect private landowners. It **only** applies to Mark Twain National Forest land.

The proposed amendment would designate the areas of influence as Management Prescription 8.1. The amendment would also add several standards and guidelines to the Forest Plan that will govern management activities within the areas of influence. It is expected that this proposed amendment would not significantly alter the Forest's multiple-use goals and objectives for long-term land and resource management because the area included in the areas of influence is relatively small.

The public scoping period for this amendment is expected to begin before the end of the year. During scoping the Forest asks for concerns and comments from the public on the proposal. Those comments and concerns will be used to determine what issues need to be considered in the environmental assessment, as well as what alternatives to the proposed action will be analyzed. A final decision is expected in summer of 2001.

If you received this notice in the mail, then you are on our mailing list and will receive a copy of the scoping letter for this amendment. For more information, contact Laura Watts at Mark Twain National Forest, 401 Fairgrounds Road, Rolla, MO 65401, or by phone at (573) 341-7471.